

The Dispatch Organization and Functions

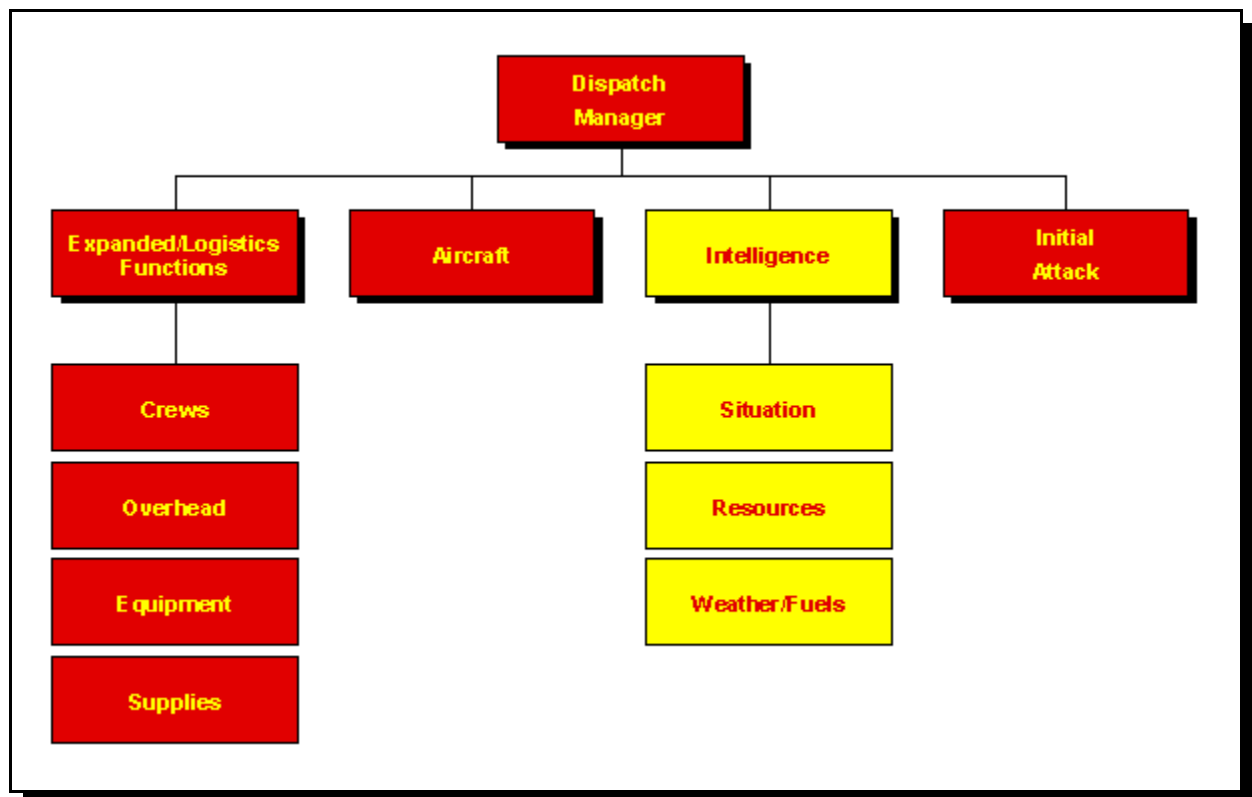
When additional support is needed for large incidents at the local level, the dispatch organization is usually split into 2 separate functions. An “Expanded Dispatch” is set up to support the large incident(s) while the existing Initial Attack Dispatch continues to handle new fires.

The “Expanded” or “Logistics” functions include Crews, Overhead (Personnel), Equipment, and Supplies. The dispatchers working these desks process requests for the resources needed to support the incident(s).

The Aircraft function coordinates with the Expanded Dispatch to support their logistical needs (transport of personnel, crews, supplies, etc.). They also work with the Initial Attack Dispatch to fill the tactical aircraft needs of new fires (airtankers, etc.).

Like the Aircraft desk, the Intelligence desk also coordinates with both the Expanded and Initial Attack Dispatches, gathering information from and sharing it with both entities. The Intelligence section deals with 3 primary types of information: situation, resource status, and weather/fuels. In a large organization, these subject areas may be split into separate desks.

With the exception of Initial Attack, these same functional areas are also present at the geographic area and national levels of the dispatch/coordination organization.

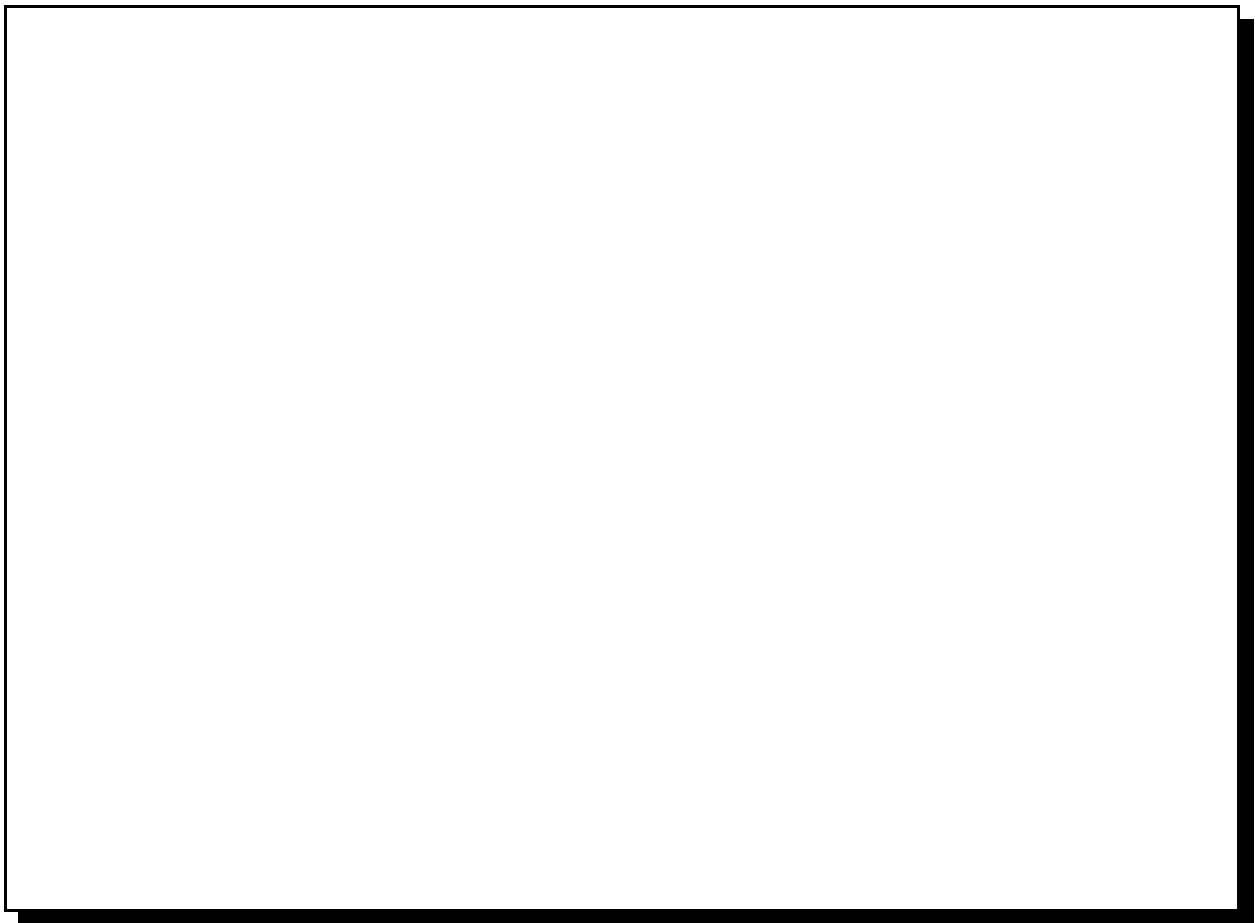


National/Geographic Area Coordination Center Organization

Geographic Area Coordination Centers (GACCs) are responsible for coordinating the mobilization of resources into and out of their geographic areas. They are the focal points for internal and external requests for resources not filled at the local level.

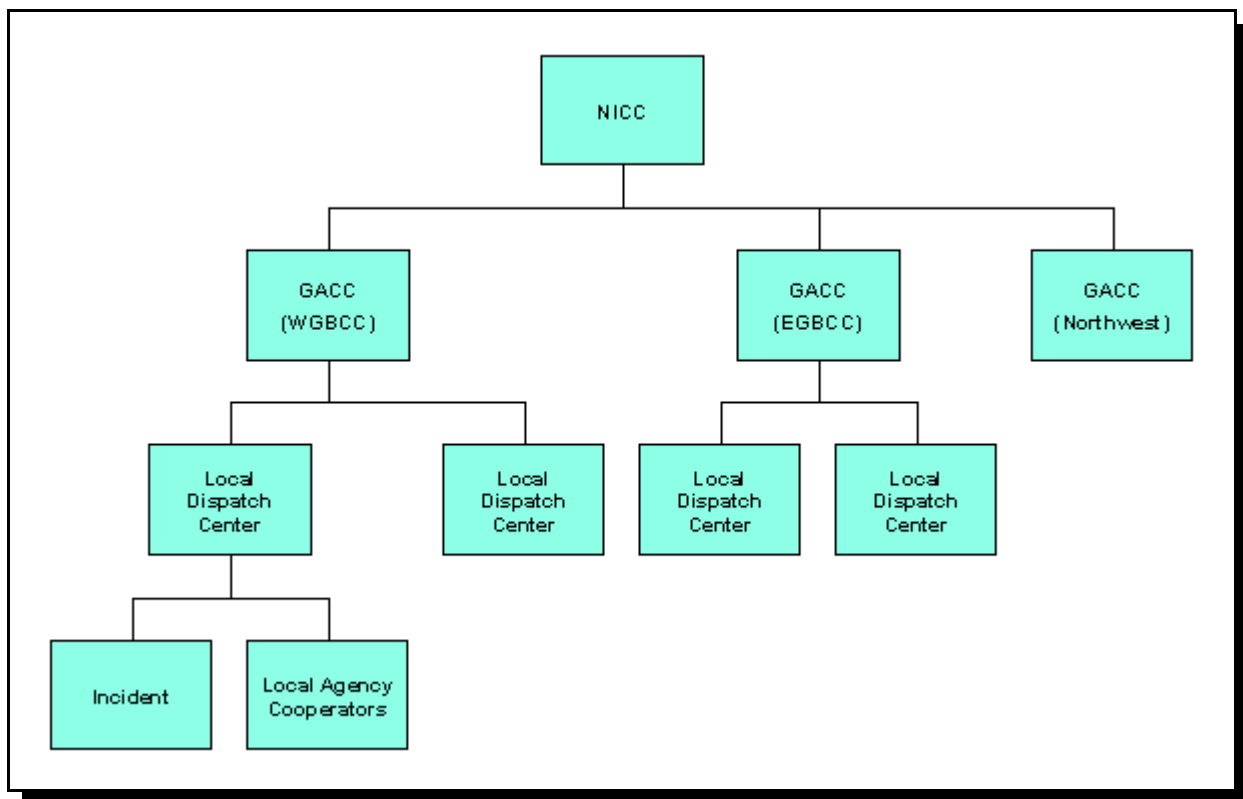
GACCs also collect and distribute information on incidents occurring within their geographic areas. There are 11 GACCs, one for each of the geographic areas.

The National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC), located in Boise, ID, coordinates resource movements and prioritization of incidents among the 11 geographic areas.



The Dispatch/Coordination System

This illustration shows the various levels of the dispatch/coordination system. Information on the incident and requests for the resources to support it both move through the local dispatch center to the appropriate GACC. From there, the resource requests can be sent to other dispatch centers within the geographic area, to neighboring GACCs (with existing agreements), or to NICC. Similarly, information on the incident is shared at the various levels of the organization. It becomes less detailed as it travels upward, presenting a broader view of the situation.



The Intelligence Role

The Intelligence section is the focal point for gathering, analyzing, and distributing information – you have the power to make sure everyone is better informed about what is happening, as well as what is expected to happen. Your job is to give everyone the information they need to make difficult decisions.

In a busy season, there is intense competition for resources. Timely, accurate reporting of Intelligence information is the key to getting the resources to where they are needed the most.

Decision Support Exercise (15 minutes)

You and the other the students at your table are a local Multi-Agency Coordinating (MAC) Group comprised of local agency fire managers. You have multiple fires and not enough resources to go around. Brainstorm within your group and come up with a list of questions or pieces of information you need to make decisions on using the resources you have most effectively. You will need to pick a spokesperson to present your list to the group. Write your questions on the flip chart by your table.

Sources of Intelligence

Now that we have a better idea of what information is needed, let's look at some of the tools and sources we have to gather it.



1. **ICS-209** - The most important piece of information you'll get from the incident is the Incident Status Summary, or ICS-209. If completed accurately, this 2-page form will give you most of the information you need. We will cover the ICS-209 in depth in the next unit.

2. **Fire Information/News Releases** - The Fire Information section at the incident produces news releases on a regular time schedule to keep the public and media informed. These can be a valuable source of information dealing with the “human interest” side of the incident (evacuations, closures, social/economic impacts, etc.). Just be aware that the ICS-209 is the official story, approved by the Incident Commander. If information on a news release is at odds with the ICS-209, try to double-check the information. If that isn’t possible, go with the ICS-209.
3. **Incident Action Plans** - You should also get a copy of the Incident Action Plan (IAP) from the incident each day (or sometimes twice daily). The IAP is a good source of information on who’s who at the incident (division assignments, names and numbers for command and general staff, etc.). It will also outline the plans for the next operational period, and generally includes a map of the incident which shows the different stages of line construction, division locations, etc.
4. **Briefings** - If you have the opportunity, it’s a good idea to sit in on briefings or conference calls involving Incident Commanders, agency fire managers, technical specialists (aviation, weather, and fire behavior) dispatch/coordination center managers. You can pick up invaluable information on emerging fire activity, resource commitments and planned releases, progress and/or problems on large fires, staging and/or preposition plans, and fire behavior/weather outlook.
5. **Sit Reports** - Situation Reports are produced on an interagency basis at all levels of the dispatch/coordination system (local, geographic area, and national), and are accessible via the internet. Reports from the centers above and/or below you, as well as from your neighbors/counterparts, can be very useful in formulating a picture of the fire situation and level of resource commitment.
6. **Weather Forecasts** - Fire Weather forecasts from the National Weather Service are produced twice daily for each weather zone and are available via the internet. After a discussion of weather patterns/influences, the forecast will generally include specifics on the sky (clear, partly cloudy, etc.), temperature (highs and lows), relative humidity (maximum and minimum), winds, lightning activity level, and Haines Index for the next 24-48 hours. Although more general (and less reliable), forecasts also include short and long range outlooks. When combined with fuel moisture/National Fire Danger Rating System (NFDRS) indices and Remote Automatic Weather Station (RAWS) information (more on all of this later), this information will give you a good idea of the potential for fire activity in your area.
7. **Resource Status Information** - Information on the status (availability or commitment) of firefighting resources can be obtained in several different ways. Many of the GACCs produce daily resource summaries of their aircraft, crews, engines, etc. and post them on the internet. You can also check with the other function desks and/or the supervisor/coordinator in the office to see what is committed and where there may be critical shortages. The Resource Ordering and Statusing System (ROSS) is also a great source of information.

Points of Contact

- ☞ Other desk functions within the local center (I.A. or expanded) or GACC and the supervisor/Coordinator.
- ☞ Incident Management Team (IMT) members such as the Planning Section Chief, Situation Unit Leader, and Fire Information section.
- ☞ Agency Fire Managers, External Affairs Officers, and GIS specialists.
- ☞ Intelligence sections at other offices or levels of the dispatch/coordination system.
- ☞ Fire Weather Forecaster(s), GACC Meteorologists, and Fire Behavior Analyst(s).
- ☞ Media representatives (to a small degree - they will usually deal with the Fire Information/External Affairs people).
- ☞ Multi-Agency Coordinating (MAC) Group members.



Main Duties

We've already talked about the Intelligence role of gathering, analyzing, and distributing information. We've covered the main sources of Intelligence and listed the points of contact for obtaining and distributing information.

Again, the goal is to give everyone the information they need to make often difficult decisions. So now let's talk about the main duties you'll be performing. They generally fall within the following functional areas:



1. **Supporting operational decisions** by collecting, consolidating, analyzing, distributing and displaying incident and resource status information. This would include such duties as:
 - a. Preparing the Interagency Situation Report, resource status summaries, and tactical reports.
 - b. Putting together materials requested by a supervisor/ coordinator, agency manager, or MAC Group.
 - c. Producing/maintaining Intelligence displays.
 - d. Posting information on the internet.

2. **Communicating information** via briefings (oral and/or written).
3. **Assessing future potential for fire activity** (both short and long term) by monitoring weather and fuel conditions (often referred to as Predictive Services). Duties in this area would involve such things as:
 - a. Maintaining station catalogs and entering/retrieving weather station data via the Weather Information Management System (WIMS),
 - b. Retrieving NFDRS indices from WIMS and/or comparing conditions against historical fire occurrence data using the FireFamily+ software.
 - c. Using climatology data, weather forecasts, fuel moisture information, and fire occurrence data to produce a potential assessment on a regular basis.



Intelligence Products

- ⇒ *ICS-209*
- ⇒ *Situation Reports/IMSR*
- ⇒ *Resource Summaries*
- ⇒ *Tactical Reports*
- ⇒ *Incident Priorities*
- ⇒ *Assessments*
- ⇒ *Briefings*
- ⇒ *Displays*

Some of these products are done on a daily basis, some are done only during certain preparedness levels or monthly, and others are ongoing.

Your involvement as a producer or reviewer of these products will vary, depending on the level of the organization at which you're working. For example, at the local level you would be responsible for the initial entry of information into the Situation Report program. At the GACC, you would be retrieving, reviewing, and editing (if necessary) the information entered by the centers in your area. At the NICC, you would be pulling the reports from the GACCs and using them to generate the Incident Management Situation Report (IMSR).

Food for Thought

Maybe it's the title (Intelligence), or maybe it's all the computer programs we use and the different set of contacts we deal with, but many people seem to be intimidated by idea of performing the Intelligence function.

If you've ever done any of these things in a dispatch office, you were actually performing the Intelligence function:

1. Obtain initial attack size-up information
2. Check on location/availability of airtankers, etc.
3. Enter/edit RAWs observations in WIMS
4. Collect and relay:
 - weather forecasts, Red Flags, spots, etc.
 - fire behavior and/or fuels information








Required Knowledge/Skills

- ☐ Incident Command System (ICS)
- ☐ WIMS and NFDRS
- ☐ Fuels, fire weather, and fire behavior terminology/definitions
- ☐ Computer skills – internet, word processing, and databases
- ☐ Resource types and the ordering process
- ☐ Organizing and communicating information



Don't be intimidated by this list - most of these skills can be developed over time. At the entry level, familiarity with the Incident Command System (ICS) and Incident Management Team (IMT) organization and terminology is necessary. Also necessary is a basic understanding of fire weather, fire behavior, and fire tactics (topics that will be covered in a later unit of this course). Although dispatching experience is not necessary, an understanding of resource types and the ordering process is.

Reference Materials Needed

-  Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for desk
-  Mobilization Guides (GA/National)
-  Telephone/e-mail lists for points of contact
-  User's Guides (Sit Report, WIMS, etc.)
-  Local agency maps
-  Mnemonics tables and Unit Identifier book
-  Other pertinent local information



Hopefully, you'll be working in an office where these materials have already been developed and are readily at hand. If not, you'll need to seek them out or, in some cases, create them.

Briefing Information on Arrival

Here is a list of items that you'll want to be briefed on when you arrive for your assignment:

- ☐ Office orientation (layout, equipment, computer systems, and display space)
- ☐ Location of reference materials
- ☐ Working relationships/points of contact
- ☐ Shift schedules and timekeeping
- ☐ Per diem, travel, motels
- ☐ Performance evaluations/task books

The handout (Initial Briefing Checklist) will help you to identify your points of contact, reference material locations, office equipment/systems, work schedule, etc. Some of the things you might want to think about when you get your resource order or arrive at the assignment are:

Who are your customers? What are the names/numbers of your contacts? Who are the local agency managers and what are their phone numbers/electronic addresses?

What are the duties and responsibilities of the Intelligence function in the office? What are the local GACC's requirements and time frames for retrieving/submitting intelligence information.

What computer equipment, reference materials and guidelines (SOP, desk book), and display space are available to you?

How will you interact and share information with the rest of the Dispatch staff, supervisor, and Fire Information function? Will the supervisor want situation updates? If so, how often?

Will the Intelligence section need to expand in order to handle the workload? How many people will be needed and how will you divide up the workload? (Your supervisor will need to be involved in this.)

The "Job List and Reminders for the Intelligence Section" included in your Job Aids should also help you to clarify your role and relationships within the local organization.